



Latrobe Valley Naturalist

July - August 2016

Issue No. 585

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General meetings

Held at 7:30 pm on the
fourth Friday of each month
at the Newborough Uniting
Church, Old Sale Road
Newborough VIC 3825



Berries of the Drooping Beard-heath *Leucopogon gelidus* photographed during the spring camp at Mount Baw Baw (Photo: Baiba Stevens).

Upcoming events

July general meeting: Friday 22 July – Winter members' night, various speakers

Excursion: Saturday 23 July – Lyrebird Walk at Darlimurla. Meet 9.30am at Baromi carpark in Mirboo North.

Botany Group: Saturday 30 July – Mosses under the microscope. Meet 10am at Ken Harris' place in Churchill.

Bird Group: Tuesday 2 Aug – Erica area. Meet 9.30am at the Tyers River Bridge picnic ground on Walhalla Rd 19km north of Moe.

August general meeting: Friday 26 August – Rakali: Conservation and monitoring of Australia's 'otter' – Geoff Williams.

Excursion: Saturday 27 August – Tarra Bulga NP. Details TBC.

Botany Group: Saturday 3 September – Traralgon South Flora Reserve. Meet 10am, location TBC.

Bird Group: Tuesday 6 Sept – Meet 9.30am at Wirilda Environment Park via Clarkes Rd north off Moe-Glengarry Rd.

Excursion to Nangara Reserve, Jindivick

It was a cool, cloudy morning for this excursion on 28th November 2015. The first challenge was actually finding the reserve as it wasn't well signposted, but about a dozen people found their way to Nangara, a reserve of some 14.07 hectares located 3kms south-west of Jindivick. The reserve consists of lowland forest, with eucalypts Messmate, Mountain Grey Gum and Silvertop Ash, a number of wattles and a diverse understorey of many ferns and wildflowers. During the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009, part of the reserve was burnt, but there has been significant regeneration since then. Indigenous cultural heritage is also an important feature of the reserve.

Our leader for today was Peter Ware who is involved in a project in Drouin to preserve their significant giant trees. Peter led us up the road first, and it wasn't long before the botanists were lagging behind with many interesting flora to be examined along the way, whilst the birdos could hear lots of birds, a Red-Browed Finch being one of the first spotted. There were a number of horse cavalettis to step over at the various entrances into the reserve and near the first one there was an interesting bundle of caterpillars on a log which Ken Harris confirmed as sawfly larvae.

As we headed into the reserve, there was an unusual small brown bird, too big for a Thornbill, and soon identified as a Brown Gerygone. Soon after, a Brown Goshawk flew overhead and this was one bird we were able to add to Peter Ware's extensive list of birds in the reserve. The flora group had already had an interesting find, a rare groundsel species, identified as *Senecio velleioides* or Forest Groundsel.

We headed back to the cars to collect our lunch things and enjoyed a leisurely break at the Black Saturday memorial picnic area. Whilst having lunch, we spotted a number of birds including a Satin Flycatcher and Lewin's Honeyeater. Two Eastern Yellow Robins also visited us during lunch. An interesting plant at the lunch spot was a clematis, *Clematis aristata*.

Among the books Peter Ware had brought with him were a bird book and plant book he had made himself. These were well done, being spiral-bound and most informative including great photos, distribution maps and Peter's own descriptive comments.

The sun came out whilst we were enjoying the break and although some people needed to leave, those remaining decided to go for another ramble. We went up Quarry Track and turned into Tatalek Track.

We passed a couple of small dams which were ponds left over from when the reserve had been used as a quarry. There were some attractive decorated bollards throughout the reserve, a range of nest boxes, and some unusual works of art which we saw on this part of the walk. One of my favourites was the collection of wooden wombats. One of the more interesting plants spotted by Wendy Savage along this part of the walk was *Solanum prunifolium*, a type of nightshade.



Solanum prunifolium (photo: Wendy McDonald)

By the time the excursion was ending, it had warmed up into a glorious late spring day and Nangara Reserve had been a wonderful place to spend it in.

Wendy McDonald

The wooden wombats (photo: Wendy McDonald)



Peter & Wendy’s bird list

Brown Gerygone	Brown Goshawk	Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella
Eastern Whipbird	Eastern Yellow Robin	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Grey Fantail
Grey Shrike-thrush	Laughing Kookaburra	Lewin’s Honeyeater	Pied Currawong
Raven sp.	Red-browed Finch	Satin flycatcher	Scarlet Robin
Striated Thornbill	Superb Fairy-wren	White-browed Scrubwren	White-throated Treecreeper
Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo			

Wonnangatta Orchid Survey

The annual monitoring of the Pale Golden Moth orchid *Diuris ochroma* in Wonnangatta Valley took place from Wed 2 – Fri 4 December 2015 and I took up the offer sent to our club to participate. The monitoring activity is led by Mike Duncan from DELWP’s Arthur Rylah Institute in Melbourne with support from Susan Taylor, Senior Biodiversity Officer (DELWP) at Yarram and Parks Victoria staff at Heyfield.

The invitation stated:

“Having some volunteers join us will provide extra pairs of eyes to search the grassy flats more thoroughly or allow us to extend the search area. It is also a great opportunity to gain an understanding of the challenges we face managing this threatened species and of course to enjoy the rich history of the Wonnangatta Valley.”



Pale Golden Moth Orchid (photo: Wendy Savage)

As I was the only volunteer, I was able to travel in with the Heyfield Parks Victoria staff, Jenny Lawrence and Conor Wilson. A cold snap had dropped some snow on the high plains above Licola, which was very pretty, but made our lunch stop at Bryces Gorge picnic area quite chilly. It was a 5 hour drive from Heyfield, and the last 2 hours were spent jolting down Zeka Spur Track, which drops down from the high plains to the valley. Regular humps were built into the track to direct the water off to the side, so it was a bit like being in a boat going up and over waves. It was originally built to bring logs out, but how a log truck could manage it was beyond belief.

When we got down to the valley around 4 pm, it was very warm. Mike Duncan and his offsider Brad were already there, having driven from Melbourne via Harrietville. A quick look over one survey area found no target orchids – a most unusual occurrence.

We set up camp near the confluence of the Wonnangatta River and Conglomerate Creek, and being the only campers in the valley for the two nights found it very peaceful. It was a beautiful spot amongst tall gums with the valley walls rising steeply behind. Birds were constantly calling, the Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Rufous Whistler being the most common.

Thursday was spent surveying extensively along the valley in most of the areas where orchids had been previously monitored. When the first comprehensive survey was done in 1996, over 20 sites were located on the valley floor, some of these with hundreds of the orchid recorded for each site. This year, the orchid was found at only 3 sites (none of which had orchids last year) and was absent at all the sites where it was successful last year. We found only about 90 all day, and most of these had finished flowering, so were very difficult to spot amongst the extensive swathes of kangaroo grass *Themeda triandra* and numerous dead stalks of other plants which looked similar. Possibly the dry season had caused them to flower early this year, but even so, the numbers were exceptionally low.

There has been a consistent decline in numbers since the original survey (although numbers were still strong up to around 2004) and the reasons are not known. Attempts to treat some areas differently to others with regard to weed control and burning have been complicated by a bushfire which burnt out the whole valley in 2006/07, and one section being grazed by cattle when the most recent Victorian Liberal/National government reintroduced 'trials' for alpine grazing. Jenny and Conor installed rain gauges during our visit in an attempt to shed some light on the mystery of rainfall patterns in Wonnangatta Valley. Perhaps rainfall will be able to be linked to flowering success or failure of the Wonnangatta orchid in future years.

I found the experience very interesting and enjoyable. It was a good opportunity to get some idea of what monitoring this orchid involved, and to spend time in the Wonnangatta Valley which I've always been keen to visit.

Wendy Savage

Thanks to Jenny Lawrence for proof reading and adding additional facts.

Baw Baw Wildflower Walk 2016

This year's Friends of Baw Baw NP wildflower walk to Mt St Gwinear on 9th January was most enjoyable. The weather was warm and sunny with little wind, and 43 people participated, including seven LV Field Nats: Ken H, David S, Jack W, Ron C, Joelle C, Gill and me.

Botanist John Davies and frog researcher Greg Hollis were excellent leaders as always. Greg gave interesting updates on the Baw Baw Frog recovery program at Zoos Victoria and other recent research. He also noted the increased importance of the Snow Gum woodlands on the Baw Baw Plateau as Leadbeater's Possum habitat following the recent fires impacting so much of their normal Central Highlands habitat.

The group ended up splitting in two as most went to the summit and on to the rock shelter or the cold hollow just before it, while a few ambled or botanised in more detail lower down. Jack enjoyed checking out the Tingaringy Gum and other species. A small patch of Veined Sun-orchid

Thelymitra cyanea was flowering beautifully at the summit, while there was a profusion of Gentians in flower further on. David found a solitary Sky Lily *Herpolirion novaezelandiae* in flower well away from the track, and I regretted not heading that way!

Phil Rayment

New bridge at Energy Australia wetlands

The Field Nats' Bird Group are delighted with the "modern Morwell River Bridge" that Denis Nagle and his team have erected so that we can cross over, instead of sloshing through, a wet patch in the Energy Australia wetlands around the south-east corner of the Yallourn open-cut mine. Congratulations and thank you to EA and Indigenous Design for this great construction. It will certainly aid us in our bird surveys. The Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists' Club began observing birds in the wetlands in August 2006 and started quarterly bird surveys in 2008. Now, after 30 visits supervised by Indigenous Design staff, a total of 144 species of birds have been observed in the area. This is around 70% of all the species recorded in the Latrobe Region (an area from Mt Worth SP to Holey Plains SP, Baw Baw NP to Mirboo North). A great birding spot of which both EA and ID can be rightly proud.

Alix Williams



The opening of the new bridge at the EA Wetlands on 2nd February (photo: Joelle Champert)

CLUB SUMMER CAMP 2016 – Part 1

This year's summer camp was held on 5-8th February at Mt Baw Baw. Based at the Edski Lodge in the Baw Baw village, we spent two full days exploring tracks in the area, and nights surveying moths. Saturday morning's walks along Beech Trail and Latrobe Trail led us through magnificent Snow Gum woodland and, in the afternoon, a trek along Muellers Track and the Summit Trail provided spectacular views of the surrounding mountains. Those who conquered Mt Saint Phillack and Mt Saint Gwinear on Sunday were rewarded with a great diversity of subalpine heath plants and charming reptiles, while others who explored the alpine bogs on the Baw Baw plateau also made the most of the summery weather and encountered some botanical beauties.

Beech Trail and Latrobe Trail – Saturday morning

A leisurely walk along Beech Trail offered an introduction, or re-introduction, to the unique flora of the Snow Gum areas of Baw Baw. Sheltered and shaded by the stand of relatively tall Snow Gums, shrubs, herbs, sedges and grasses flourished along the sides of the track.

Being late summer, the beauty of many of the plants was in their berries, seed capsules and seeds. The rich brown seed heads of the Australian Caraway were abundant and striking with their arrangement of seeds at the tips of the 'spokes' of 'wheels'. The brown spent flower heads of Blue Bottle-daisies were ringed with tiny flask-shaped cypselae. Patches of Bird-orchids lifted their seed capsules high, and single stems of Mountain Pennywort lifted whorls of developing seeds above the level of its leaves.

In places, the bright yellow flowers of Fireweed Groundsel *Senecio linearifolius* lined the path. Here and there along the track, colour and interest was added by blooms of Thrift-leaved Triggerplant, Mountain Baeckea, Mueller's Snow Gentian, Mauve Leek-orchid and the Alpine Greenhood.

We recognised isolated shrubs of Myrtle Beech *Nothofagus cunninghamii*, Alpine Bottle-brush and Broad-leaf Teatree. We learned to distinguish between the two Beard-heaths. Both shrubs have small leaves and red berries but the berries of *Leucopogon gelidus*, having developed from flowers on pendant spikes, hang from short stems, while those of *Acrothamnus maccraei* sit upright on the branches. *A. maccraei* also has smaller 4-8mm long leaves, compared with *L. gelidus*, which has 10-25mm long leaves.

Most of the plants we met here were to be encountered again during the weekend, sometimes in more abundance, as we explored more tracks around the village and beyond.



Subalpine Beard-heath *Acrothamnus maccraei* (photo: Baiba Stevens)



Seed pods of Alpine Orites
(photo: Baiba Stevens)

After leaving the Beech Trail, the morning walk continued along a higher track through Snow Gum woodland. The understorey first encountered was patches of dense Candle-heath *Richea continentis*. This was quickly joined by Mueller's Bush-pea *Pultenaea muelleri*, the Beard-heaths mentioned previously and the Alpine Orites *Orites lancifolia*. The Orites had finished flowering, but the flowers were now replaced by brown seed cases, split along one side, giving them an interesting boat shape. We also encountered large expanses of Baw Baw Berry *Wittsteinia vacciniacea* scrambling over the bases of the Snow Gums.

Being avid botanists, as well as looking at the general woodland structure our eyes are often concentrated to looking at the ground, so we are able to be delighted by the smallest plants. A small patch near the base of a low embankment amazed us with its diversity. Intermingled were the Small Poranthera *Poranthera microphylla*, the Coarse Bottle-daisy *Lagenophora huegelii*, Caraway and Pennywort, with the ever-present *Viola hederacea*. There was excitement over the Clubmoss *Lycopodium fastigiatum*, which even had its clubs, or reproductive strobili, held high above the leafy stems. Mountain Cotula *Leptinella filicula* had interesting brown patches on its leaves, caused by the cup fungus *Fabraea rhytismoidea*. However, the best find was a few specimens of the white-flowered Pretty Grass-flag *Libertia pulchella* with freesia-like leaves. The white flower has two distinct whorls of three tepals each.



Fungus growing on Mountain Cotula leaves (photo: Baiba Stevens)

Along the more exposed sections of the path and heading back towards the accommodation, were drifts of the very pretty Soft Snow-grass *Poa hiemata*, displaying its purplish inflorescences enjoying the sunshine.

It must be noted that the flies were also extremely keen to join us in our botanising. Jack's Sunday quote of the day was "We can't say a plague of flies, because plagues eventually go away."

Margaret Rowe and Baiba Stevens

Muellers Track and Summit Trail – Saturday afternoon

After lunch back at the lodge, most of us went out to enjoy the glorious afternoon weather and see what else we could discover. We huffed and puffed to varying degrees up the 570 m steepish Muellers Track through Snow Gum woodland and then onto the 2.5 km Summit Trail at Five Ways junction. Most of the plants we had seen during the morning were also present here, however it was noticed that they seemed to be later-flowering eg. the Silver Daisy *Celmisia sp.* and the Grass Trigger-plant *Stylidium graminifolium*. Some plants not listed earlier were Alpine Rice-flower *Pimelea alpina*, Milfoil Speedwell *Derwentia nivea* and Alpine Bottlebrush *Callistemon ptyoides*. Mueller's Lookout, named after the first European to climb Mt Baw Baw [1564m], provided grand views of Mt Saint Phillack, Phillack Saddle and Mt Saint Gwinear, and in the distance to the north-east, the Snowy Range and Bennison High Plains.

Meandering along, we came to the heritage-listed Summit Cairn. This was used as a reference point in 1870 for the Geodetic Coastal Survey of Victoria. The photo on the information board showed many of the stones have gone as it was once much higher than it is today. Clear views from here were of the Strzelecki Ranges and the Latrobe Valley. Heading down, we saw Macleay's Swallowtail and Alpine Xenica butterflies, katydids, skinks, a tiger snake, spiders and a spectacular Crane Fly and heard Olive Whistlers, White-eared Honeyeaters, Crimson Rosellas and Robins.

I was not aware of it at the time, but the Snow Gums around Downey's Picnic Area are home to the rare Sooty Owl. Will have to go out there at dusk next time and hope for a sighting.

Julie Parker

Mt Saint Phillack and Mt Saint Gwinear – Sunday

There were 11 in the group who decided to do the full day walk up to the high points of the plateau, a return trip of 12km led by Phil and Jenny. We started off up Muellers Trail, but having walked it the day before and identified the plants, progress was faster. Soon the track flattened out and it was not too hot walking under the Snow Gums. The purple Trigger-plants and white Snow Daisies were very pretty, scattered here and there. There were many patches of Snow Gentians, mainly white but some with a delicate blue wash. A patch of fresh Orange Everlastings *Xerochrysum subundulatum* looked stunning growing beside a boardwalk. It was quite remarkable that all along this first part of the walk the ground was liberally littered with gall-covered leaves that had dropped off the Snow Gums. Some of the galls that I looked inside seemed to have a very small web-covered object, presumably a pupating insect.

Along the track linking the Village Trail and the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT) there was a large and informative interpretive sign telling the history of this track, part of which took early travellers between Baw Baw and Walhalla. Climbing further upwards on the AAWT, we reached Phillack Saddle where we stopped for morning tea. This was an open, grassy spot surrounded by shrubs such as Alpine Orites, Alpine Daisy-bush and Richea or Candle Heath (*Richea continentis*, which grows to about one metre – we didn't find any *Richea victoriana*, which is much taller and endemic to the Baw Baw Plateau and the Blue Range between Marysville and Taggerty). From here we could see Mueller's Lookout and the phone tower on the summit of Mt Baw Baw, which we had walked to the day before. Phil had appointed himself 'whip' for this walk, and he very patiently waited as people stopped to look at plants or birds, but after 10 minutes' break we were whipped into action according to bushwalking rules.

We continued further upward to the summit of Mt Saint Phillack, then on to the Rock Shelter at Camp Saddle where we spent time enjoying the birds. Olive Whistlers were calling and one was finally spotted. Fergus saw a male Flame Robin – a number of females had already been seen, as well as Grey Fantails and Pipits. Alpine Water-fern *Blechnum penna-marina* grew around the sheltered rock bases along with many soft herbs.

It was much warmer walking in the open boggy heathland towards Mt Saint Gwinear. Beside the boardwalks grew Sphagnum moss, Club Moss *Lycopodium fastigiatum*, bright-green Spreading Rope-rush *Empodisma minus*, Richea and Kerosene Bush *Ozothamnus hookeri*. Orange-golden flowers of Alpine Podolepis and more white gentians added contrast to the greenery. Nearby, a lyrebird was heard. Ascending Mt Saint Gwinear, I found Lilac Berry *Trochocarpa clarkei* beside the track. It had been seen along Muellers Trail the day before, but these plants had a few lilac berries on them. Lunch was a welcome break at the summit, and we each found some shade and a suitable rock to sit upon. Our magnificent view was across the valleys of the Thomson and Aberfeldy Rivers and into the Victorian Alps.



Water skink eating a march fly (photo: Wendy Savage)

A small skink came out on a rock, and after offering it a dead March Fly, which it did not take, Peter McFarlane had the bright idea of extending it towards the skink on the end of a small stick. The skink took it from the stick and crunched it up and swallowed it quite quickly. Another of the many March Flies that were bothering us was killed and this time as Peter extended the stick forward, the skink leapt on the fly from some distance. This was duly eaten, with many photos of the performance taken. It accepted a third fly, but took it beneath a ledge. Was it too full to risk being offered another, or was it sharing it with family?

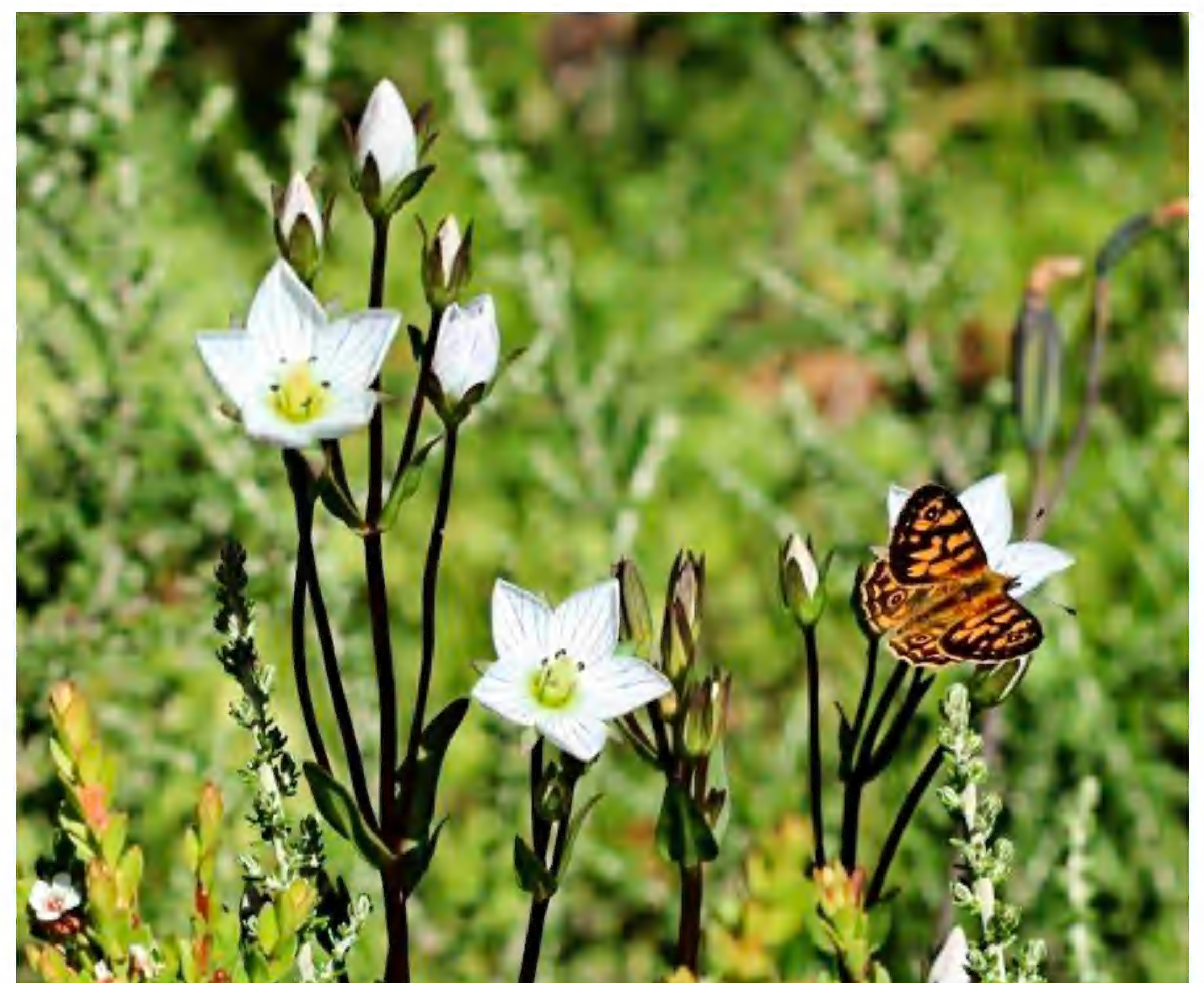
Now we had to walk all the way back in the heat. Two detours into frost hollows beside the track back to the Rock Shelter did not yield different plants as hoped, but were very scratchy experiences on narrow paths through the Richea. Wendy Davies and Goody sensibly sat under a tree instead and were rewarded with a Wedge-tailed Eagle swooping down the valley. Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos were heard. Further down the track I had a good view of a Rufous Fantail, and Ken, who was walking ahead, saw Blue-winged Parrots. A pleasant afternoon tea stop in a shady spot on seats under the Snow Gums allowed us to enjoy the peace of this lovely area before our return to the built environment of the village.

Wendy Savage

Baw Baw Plateau plants – Sunday

Jack and I joined the summer campers on Sunday, a beautiful summer's day. Margaret thought the Baw Baw Plateau may not be very attractive to Jack as there are only a few eucalypt species, but no need for worry – he could spend time on his other love, Epacridaceae.

Shortly after 9am we were on our way, albeit slowly. It took us til 3pm to cover 5 kilometres...too much to discover. Our notes covered close to 50 identified plants and lots of unknown plants by the time we returned to the village. Many photos were taken to assist with identification at home and during the meeting of the Botany group the following week.



Orange Alpine Xenica on Snow Gentian flowers (photo: Ken Harris)

The highlight of the day was a visit to a bog. A lot of time was spent on knees and haunches to look at the tiny plants that were growing among the rocks and pools. Tuft Rushes *Oreobolus spp.* grow like tough, dark-green cushions while Sphagnum Moss *Sphagnum cristatum* is like a light-green, soft sponge. Mueller's Snow Gentian *Gentianella muelleriana ssp. muelleriana* was abundant and in full flower. The Mauve Leek-orchid *Prasophyllum alpestre* was seen several

times. Initially, we only found Sun-orchids in seed, but later we saw some beautiful specimens of the Veined Sun-orchid *Thelymitra cyanea* in flower. Broad-leaf Flower-rush *Carpha nivicola* and Spreading Rope-rush *Empodisma minus* were showy too. Other finds worth mentioning are:

Baeckea gunniana

Caltha introloba

Drosera arcturi

Epacris petrophila

Euchiton fordianus

Euphrasia gibbsiae subsp *subglabrifolia*

Pimelea alpina

Podocarpus lawrencei

Alpine Baeckea

Alpine Marsh-marigold

Alpine Sundew

Snow Heath

Cudweed

Broad Eyebright

Alpine Rice-flower

Mountain Plum-Pine

Marja Bouman

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING 20.06.2016

Finance

Cash Management Trading Account: \$4,223.27 Term Deposit: \$15,962.71

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

- Sound system: Alix has created an easy-to-follow guide on how to assemble and operate the sound system, for which we are grateful
- Microscope: Manufacturer in WA has replaced faulty USB connector but hadn't noticed condensation of eye piece and will take a look. He said there is dust on the sensor, about which nothing can be done, but suggested we look after the sensor a bit more.
- Club Spring Camp at Otways 21-25 October: No invoice yet received for a deposit on accommodation so D Mules will follow up with Apollo Bay YHA. Ballarat Field Nats Club said we are welcome to contact them for information on sites the camp participants may wish to visit.
- SEANA Autumn Camp 2017 at Sale: Next meeting Wed 3 August.
- Subscription fees: around half the membership have now paid 2016 subscription fee.
- Photographic competition planning: Venue hire grants open in early July, and a council staff member will walk Ken Harris through the application process. Warragul Camera Club display boards will be hired at \$150 for the week which includes delivery. Ken Smith will mount each photo using materials we will purchase. Next meeting will be held at his house.

Please note that annual club membership fees were due on
1st March 2016.

Winter Members' Night

Various speakers

July's meeting is our annual Winter Members' Night, where club members can present a short talk (~10 mins) on any topic related to natural history. A projector is available for showing Power Point presentations or photos, if required. If you would like to present to the group on this night, please register your interest by emailing David Stickney at david.stickney@westnet.com.au.



Guest speaker for August

Geoff Williams

Geoff is the director of the Australian Platypus Conservancy. He will be presenting an illustrated talk about the biology and key conservation requirements of the Golden-bellied Water-rat. He will also include tips on how to spot this fascinating native mammal in its natural habitat.



Latrobe Valley Naturalist is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club Inc. The Club subscription includes the "Naturalist".

Brief contributions and short articles on any aspect of natural history are invited from members of all clubs. Articles, including those covering Club speakers and excursions, would typically be around one A4 side in length, should not exceed 1,000 words, and may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Photos should be sent as an attachment and be a maximum of 1 megabyte in size.

Responsibility for the accuracy of information and opinions expressed in this magazine rests with the author of the article.

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Deadline for articles to be considered for inclusion in the next issue (September/October): 12 September 2016

Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club Incorporation No. A0005323T
ISSN 1030-5084 ABN 86 752 280 972

The Naturalist is generously printed by the office of Russell Northe MLA, Member for Morwell



Latrobe Valley Naturalist

If undeliverable, return to:

PO Box 1205

Morwell

VIC 3840

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Subscriptions are due on March 1st each year (half fees apply for those joining after 31 Aug)